

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL CENTER
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS
School of Medicine

January 7, 1963

Copy sent to EG
(MD)

ASTT John to
Supply Fov's letter of
Dec. 19, 1962 to Ron Wells
& better copy of his very
important letter
SS 7/8

Dr. Irving H. Sher
Institute of Scientific Information
33 South 17th Street
Philadelphia 3, Pennsylvania

Dear Irving:

from I Sher


Can we have a
copy? Or to put
on WWW?

A propos your letter of December 19 to Dr. Ronald Wells, Canberra, Australia, I must register the most vigorous exception to any proposals for the use of citation index statistics in personnel evaluation. Ultimately we may know enough about the structure of scientific communication to be able to use this kind of information intelligently, and especially to apply the necessary kind of correction factors needed for such a purpose, but until then, and I think this is a long way off, the idea of such a statistical evaluation is a dangerous one, on several counts. In the first place, it may do grave personal injustice in some specific situations, perhaps the very one of the subject letter. Two, if the misunderstanding gets around that this is an implicit objective of citation indexes, it is likely to arouse a great deal of hostility on the part of the scientific community, and this may not be always entirely rationally directed. So I would urge that you take a much more critical attitude (and I suspect we are really not basically in disagreement) in discussing this kind of application than I have read into your letter to Wells. I think there is an immense amount of research that is worth doing on the utilization of other people's work, but it would be grossly unfair to even suggest that a relative evaluation could make much use of this kind of statistical material.

There is of course an indispensable function of citation indexing in personnel selection, and this is the location of commentary on a person's work for qualitative evaluation. The function of locating the articles which may refer approvingly or otherwise should make citation indexes almost as indispensable as American Men of Science or Who's Who in trying to place a person in a field in which one has no direct familiarity. The kind of commentary that can be found by citation indexing and that has been published should be indispensable in evaluating someone's qualifications, but I would be most guarded about interpreting the numbers or even the topological structure of the citations until we have much more information than we do now.

I really do feel that we must be very cautious to keep wrong ideas about the possibilities of misuse from distorting the reactions of the scientific community at large.

Cordially,


Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics